

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

\$11.8 MILLION FOR JACKSONVILLE CEMETERY (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – An \$11.8 million contract to develop the next phase of the Jacksonville National Cemetery, which opened for burials in January 2009, has been announced. This 68-acre development is expected to provide an estimated eight years of burial benefits for veterans and their families. The project is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2011. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded the contract to E&E Enterprises Global, a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business from Hampton, Virginia.

The contract calls for the creation of 13,600 gravesites, including pre-placed crypts, in-ground cremain sites, columbaria niches and a memorial wall. Infrastructure construction will include an administration and public information building, a maintenance complex, two committal service shelters, a public assembly area, utilities and an irrigation system. The project will also incorporate roads, signage, landscaping and site furnishings.

To make burial arrangements at the Jacksonville National Cemetery, call 800-535-1117. For information about the facility, contact the cemetery staff at (904) 766-5222.

STUDY OF VIETNAM-ERA WOMEN VETERANS (VA News Release) The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching a comprehensive study of women Veterans who served in the military during the Vietnam War to explore the effects of their military service upon their mental and physical health. The study, to be managed by VA's Cooperative Studies Program, began in November and will last more than four years. Approximately 10,000 women will be contacted in a mailed survey, telephone interviews, and a review of their medical records.

The study will assess the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental and physical health conditions for women Vietnam Veterans, and explore the relationship between PTSD and other conditions. VA will study women Vietnam Veterans who may have had direct exposure to traumatic events, and for the first time, study those who served in facilities near

Vietnam. These women may have had similar, but less direct exposures. Both women Veterans who receive their health care from VA and those who receive health care from other providers will be contacted to determine the prevalence of a variety of health conditions.

The study represents to date the most comprehensive examination of a group of women Vietnam Veterans, and will be used to shape future research on women Veterans in future wars. Such an understanding will lay the groundwork for planning and providing appropriate services for women Veterans, as well as for the aging Veteran population today.

MAJOR VETERANS EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

LAUNCHED (White House Office of the Press Secretary) Washington, DC – The White House announced the launch of an initiative that is designed to transform the federal government into the model employer of America's veterans. An Executive Order on the Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government establishes the Veterans Employment Initiative for the Executive Branch. The Initiative underscores to federal agencies the importance of recruiting and training veterans, aims to increase the employment of veterans within the Executive Branch, and helps recently hired veterans adjust to service in a civilian capacity.

The Order also establishes a Veterans Employment Program Office within most federal agencies. These offices will be responsible for helping veterans identify employment opportunities within those federal agencies, providing feedback to veterans about their employment application status, and helping veterans recently employed by these agencies adjust to civilian life and a workplace culture often different than military service.

In addition, the Office of Personnel Management will issue a government-wide strategic plan that will focus on creating leadership commitment and an infrastructure in each agency to promote continued skills development and employment success for veterans. The strategic plan will also include marketing strategies aimed at agency hiring

managers as well as veterans and transitioning service members. For information, visit www.fedshirevets.gov

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS FOR VIETNAM WAR

VETERANS The 2009 Florida Legislature passed the Corporal Larry E. Smedley Vietnam Veterans High School Diploma Act. This act, effective July 1, 2009, authorizes the Commissioner of Education to award a high school diploma to honorably discharged Vietnam War veterans and will increase the opportunity for some Florida veterans to receive a high school diploma.

To be eligible, veterans must meet the following criteria: must be a Florida resident; inducted into military service before completing the necessary graduation requirements; must have served in the Vietnam Era, February 28, 1961 through May 7, 1975; and received an honorable discharge.

The Florida Departments of Education and Veterans' Affairs will work together to assist veterans with the application process for their diplomas. Interested veterans should contact Ed Ortiz at the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs at ortize@fdva.state.fl.us or by calling (727) 319-7400. Additional information may also be obtained by contacting the Division of Career and Adult Education, Florida Department of Education, 325 W. Gaines Street, Room 754 A, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 or by dialing (850) 245-9029. Applications and other relevant information can be found at <http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/veteran-diploma.asp>.

VA HONORS TOP HEALTH CARE FACILITIES (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – **The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System in Florida** and the Louisville VA Medical Center in Kentucky were selected this year as the top health care facilities within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), culminating an intense, fact-based evaluation of VA operations.

The Bay Pines Healthcare System in Florida consistently performs in the top 5 percent of all VA health care facilities. Bay Pines demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation through its use of technology, "Go Green" chemicals, and adoption of the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association's "Get with the Guidelines" program. Bay Pines is also pursuing Magnet Recognition, an award for nursing excellence given by the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

Other top-performing VA organizations recognized include the **James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital and clinics in Tampa, Florida**, whose Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center is recognized by VA as one of the finest and most comprehensive chronic pain rehabilitation programs in the nation.

THE GUIDEBOOK FOR VETERANS INCARCERATED IN FLORIDA, SOUTHERN GEORGIA, PUERTO RICO, AND THE U. S. VIRGIN ISLANDS is available at http://www1.va.gov/homeless/docs/09_FL.pdf

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov